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Testimony Re: Full-time certified school nurses

It is imperative for students in every district of New Jersey to have a full time certified school nurse employed within every school. I make this statement not just for the sake of repeating what many have said on previous occasions, but I stand here today to place emphasis on the importance and the magnitude of services that are being provided to our students every day by a full-time certified school nurses. During an election candidates say they are listening to the voice of the people: Well today I want you to listen to the voices of students, a lot of student actually 41,576.

During our present school year, Newark students made 334,499 visits to the full time certified school nurses assigned to their school buildings. They made these visits because they trust their certified school nurse. Our students are assured that the certified school nurse is an individual who is knowledgeable concerning their needs, the needs of their families and the resources that are available within their community.

The school nurses employed by the Newark Public Schools bring a wealth of experience from various health care specialties such as med-surgery, oncology, hemodialysis, psychology, pediatrics, emergency room and intensive care. In addition to their varied significant nursing experiences, our nurses mastered the course work necessary to become certified thus expanding their knowledge base. We are proud that highly qualified certified school nurses are placed within every school in the Newark District.

The role that the certified school nurse plays within the school is vital. The clinical expertise and the knowledge of guidelines regarding health services mandated by the Department of Education in the State of New Jersey equips the certified school nurse to provide the essential care needed by our students. In addition to the mandatory physical examinations and visual, hearing, dental and scoliosis screening established with the School Health Services Guidelines, each student has a completed New Jersey Health History and Appraisal which documents immunizations and an individual health history which records prenatal, neonatal, past and current illness, diseases, surgeries and hospitalizations.

The scope of practice for a certified school nurse is even greater than the guidelines. The availability of a certified school nurse provides the health resources needed by our students and their families, our administration and faculty. It is the role of the certified school nurse to assess students, identify any health problems and write appropriate plans for implementation of health services within the school environment.

All students with a significant medical condition require written Individualized Healthcare Plan, Individualized Emergency Healthcare Plan and/or §504 Accommodation plans. These plans are written by the certified school nurse in consultation with parents, the primary healthcare provider, the teachers, administration and when appropriate the attending student. This documentation is appropriate and meets the legal requirement for identifying the immediate needs of the student.

The extent of students with disabilities and the required interventions to place them inclusively within the school environment demands the expertise of a certified school nurse. There are approximately 2978 students with asthma and 72 with diabetes.

However, these two illnesses are not the full scope of health issues that plague our school environment. There are students that have tracheotomies, ventilators, gastrostomy tube feedings-including feeding pumps, seizure disorders with or without a Vagal Nerve Stimulator, renal disease, chronic and acute, genetic disorders, autism, hemophilia-requiring infusion of blood products that enhance coagulation, childhood cancers and students requiring ongoing treatment for burns.

There is new and specialized care that is being included in the revised Administrative Code. One of the most significant is the inclusion of Do Not Resuscitate Orders. The parents of a student will be able to present a Do Not Resuscitate Form and expect that the school district will follow this directive. While it is possible to do so, it requires both a sensitive review of needs and an ethical consideration of all individuals in the school environment. The plan, after approval, must consider the particular student, the family, all the other students, the faculty, and the administration. This plan must also include post event crisis and grief counseling. This emotional and intense response to the needs of a student is best facilitated by a full time certified school nurse.

Certified school nurses are prepared to do the work of the schools, educate the whole student in an appropriate and inclusive manner. They are specialists worthy of the same consideration as any other professional staff member. Nursing has experienced shortages in the past few years, but excellent certified school nurse candidates graduate from programs every year. They bring a high level of professional expertise to the school setting. Students and their families benefit from their thoughtful and insightful nursing care.